

*LGBT Detainees Specifically Targeted for Sexual Abuse, Denial of Care*

WASHINGTON—Following repeated reports of sexual abuse in the immigration detention system by the Heartland Alliance, Congressman Mike Quigley (D-IL) and Congressman Jared Polis (D-CO) requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate and offer possible remedies to improve conditions at Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities and those with which they contract. According to government documents, nearly 200 allegations of abuse from detainees in detention facilities across the nation have been reported to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) since 2007. Many of these incidents have involved LGBT immigrants.

“The government has a moral responsibility to ensure the safety of any person under its charge,” said **Rep. Quigley**. “The pervasive and systematic abuse of detainees held in immigration detention facilities, especially gay and transgender individuals, is unconscionable and should be addressed at the highest level. I am confident that DHS and DOJ will work quickly to review this matter and do everything in the agencies power to prevent further instances of sexual abuse, essentially at the hands of the government.”

“The continued reports of sexual abuse against immigrants in ICE detention facilities are appalling,” said **Rep. Polis**. “Here we have people who are at their most vulnerable—many without access to any legal assistance—who are being preyed upon and assaulted. LGBT immigrants appear to be special targets for abuse in ICE facilities. I expect that GAO will conduct a thorough investigation and offer up solutions that will end this intolerable situation.”

In a letter to the GAO led by Quigley and Polis and signed by 28 other Members of Congress, it was urged that an investigation include facilities run by ICE, private facilities under contract with ICE to hold immigration detainees, and those public facilities (like county jails) also under contract with ICE. Further, the letter requested GAO identify what steps DHS is taking to rectify the problem and suggest additional actions the Department should consider to ensure that sexual abuse does not continue to plague the immigration detention system.

Members signing the letter included: Zoe Lofgren (D-CA); Yvette Clarke (D-NY); Judy Chu (D-CA); Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL); Barbara Lee (D-CA); Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC); Charles Rangel (D-NY); Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL); Gwen Moore (D-WI); Michael Honda (D-CA); Janice

Hahn (D-CA); José Serrano (D-NY); Bob Filner (D-CA); Loretta Sanchez (D-CA); Nydia Velazquez (D-NY); Carolyn Maloney (D-NY); Laura Richardson (D-CA); James Moran (D-VA); John Olver (D-MA); Steve Rothman (D-NJ); John Lewis (D-GA); Robert Brady (D-PA); Alcee Hastings (D-FL); Henry Waxman (D-CA); George Miller (D-CA); Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA); Pete Stark (D-CA); and Lynn Woolsey (D-CA).

The full text of the letter can be found below. It is also available [here](#) .

The Honorable Gene Dodaro

Comptroller General

U.S. Government Accountability Office

441 G Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We are writing to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) undertake an investigation into the incidence of sexual violence against immigrants in the custody of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). While we applaud the administration for the steps it has taken to reform our immigration detention system, we are concerned about ongoing reports of sexual abuse at facilities housing immigrant detainees.

In April 2011, Heartland Alliance's National Immigrant Justice Center filed a mass civil rights complaint with DHS reporting several recent incidents of sexual abuse in immigration detention.

The victims in these cases report instances of sexual abuse, denials of medical care, long-term solitary confinement and misuse of segregation due to sexual minority status, and a pervasive culture of hostility towards gay and transgender individuals in some facilities.

In October, Frontline aired its documentary “Lost in Detention,” which detailed the pervasive nature of sexual abuse in immigration detention facilities. The documentary drew on documents obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union under the Freedom of Information Act which highlight the severity and breadth of the problem. According to government documents, nearly 200 allegations of abuse from detainees in detention facilities across the nation have been reported to DHS since 2007 alone. Given that sexual violence is often underreported, as victims are afraid to come forward with their claims, this figure likely understates the severity of the problem.

In spite of these reports, the Department of Justice recently announced that immigration detention facilities will not be covered by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). Therefore, we respectfully request that the GAO undertake a detailed audit of immigration detention facilities used by DHS to detain immigrants to investigate the incidence of sexual violence. This review should include facilities run by the Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), private facilities under contract with ICE to hold immigration detainees, and those public facilities (like county jails) also under contract with ICE. Additionally, please identify what steps DHS is taking to rectify the problem and suggest any actions it needs to consider in order to ensure that sexual abuse does not continue to plague the immigration detention system. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and attention to this request.

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